

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Calls for transparency and compliance from federal agencies

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WASHINGTON – On Tuesday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), Ranking Member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, called on federal agencies to be transparent and comply with congressional oversight during a hearing with Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.), Chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. The hearing focused on the corruption, misconduct and long-term failures of U.S. Penitentiary Atlanta (USPA), a federal prison in Georgia.

The Department of Justice repeatedly obstructed Sens. Johnson and Ossoff's 10-month investigation into USPA. DOJ's obstruction ultimately resulted in Sens. Johnson and Ossoff issuing a subpoena for Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Michael Carvajal's appearance at the hearing.

"My six years as chairman of the committee certainly opened up my eyes at how weakened congressional oversight has become over the years. We have very limited enforcement power. As a result, the agencies just thumb their nose at us. I think you saw that here. These are legitimate issues. These are long standing problems. The fact that the Department of Justice, the Bureau of Prisons weren't fully cooperating with this is absurd," **said Sen. Johnson.**

Senator Johnson submitted an opening statement for the record, which can be found [here](#).

Watch the full hearing [here](#).

Excerpts can be found below.

On Lack of Transparency

“It is that arrogance. It is that lack of transparency. It is that dishonesty that have Americans losing confidence in these institutions that, quite honestly, they need to have confidence in. It’s an unsustainable state of affairs in a democracy when the chief federal law enforcement division, the FBI, can’t be trusted – can’t be trusted to be nonpolitical and shows themselves to be completely political. When the Department of Justice blocks our ability to talk to one of their directors with legitimate oversight. When our federal health agencies have not been honest and transparent regarding a pandemic. So this lack of transparency has to end and congressional oversight needs to be kicked into high gear.”

On the Importance of Whistleblowers

“If you are a whistleblower in the Department of Justice, the FBI, please come forward. If you want to restore integrity and credibility to your agencies, come forward and tell Congress so the American people understand the truth. I would also make that appeal to people working in our federal health agencies. Our response to COVID has been a miserable failure, largely because our health agency have not been transparent. I’ve written 43 oversight letters to the agencies. Where I’ve gotten responses, they’re non-responsive responses. Generally, I don’t even get answers. This lack of transparency must end. We must restore congressional oversight because the American people deserve the truth.”

On Congressional Oversight

“The reason I’m asking these questions is congressional oversight has been significantly weakened over the years. I’m fully aware of it. I understand the full frustration of members of Congress trying to get the truth to the American public. That’s our job. Okay. But the agencies thumb their nose at Congress with impunity. So to me, this is as important as your testimony is in terms of the problems at Atlanta, maybe even a bigger issue for me in this hearing is – why did it take a subpoena to get the director of the Bureau of Prisons to come here and testify before us to help us conduct our oversight? What is going on in the Department of Justice that they refuse to be transparent until Congress, the Senate, has to issue them a subpoena? You know, we bring department heads before our committees, have them testify before us. We almost always ask them the question – will you comply with congressional oversight requests?”

On DOJ Obstruction

“Again, I appreciate you coming here. What I don’t appreciate is how difficult it was to get you here. And I don’t appreciate, again, from my standpoint, the obstruction to this committee’s investigation, our oversight, by somebody in the Department of Justice. I don’t think it was this fella from the Office of Legislative Affairs. I think somebody else or some other persons didn’t want this hearing to occur or did not want to cooperate with this investigation. So, again, I give kudos to the chairman for pursuing this against resistance and obstruction. I think we see why this is so important. There are some serious problems and they have not been effectively addressed. They haven’t. I wish they had been. These are outstanding issues for years. Somebody’s got to be held accountable.”